It can be said that from the time of the Conquest such information as we have about the Indians in their ramifications and languages we owe to the Missionary Fathers. Any attempt to write about these Indians whom the Spaniards found on our continent really has to take very specially into account the writings of these meritorious soldiers of Christ.

"The Matacos are also known by the names Mataguayos, Notenes, Vejoses, Ocoles, Malbalas, Chunupis (1) and others, according to location. All of them with only slight differences speak the same language and their customs are practically identical. They occupy the western part of central and southern Chaco, principally both banks of the Bermejo River and the right bank of the Pilcomayo." [599]

1. Not to be confused with the Chunupi-Vilelas.

"The number of these Indians is probably about 20,000. Some of them already have dealings with the frontier Christians, among whom they spend some time each year, working on their ranches; while others live in complete isolation from the whites, whom they regard as their enemies, and not without reason, especially the Argentines who for some years now have been systematically ousting them from their lands, persecuting and exterminating them. It is probable then that within a few years the Matacos will have undergone great changes in their manner of living and will have diminished in number. Be that as it may the present day Matacos are still constituents of quite a large tribe which is different in some respects from the others.

The Mataco is of middling stature, somewhat slim and of a dark coppery color; apathetic in nature, reserved and wary, his glance reflects suspicion and treachery. His manners are boorish and his person and physiognomy vile and repulsive. He is a thief by instinct and he also steals because he considers it his duty. He is long-suffering and warlike, lazy and dirty in habit and innately cowardly and vengeful. The individual members of the neighboring tribes are characterized by a mental alertness which, though untutored is there for all to see. Not so the Matacos, who are mentally sluggish and to whom one cannot even attribute astuteness, in spite of their being sneak thieves. They are admired by all for the apparent lack of feeling with which they endure insults and also for the cold-bloodedness with which they will stab an enemy or allow themselves to be stabbed."

114 It is strange that in the last two reports so much importance has been given to the Noctén tribes about which nothing is said by authors writing in colonial times. This in itself already tends to favor the hypothesis that the Noctenes may be the Tonocotés.

In this part of the continent it does not seem that there occurred that veritable extermination of whole tribes, such as was the case with the Charruas in Uruguay and we must therefore search about somewhere for the 60,000 and more Indians who understood or spoke the Tonocoté language. Among them were the Mataguayos, who exist down to the present day; it would be only natural, then, to affirm that Mataguayo is a dialect of Tonocoté, and since Noctén and Mataguayo are closely related dialects, it follows that Noctén is as much a dialect of Tonocoté as is Mataguayo.

In the following chapter I shall set forth a report which was sent to me by Father Eliseo Molina of the Franciscan College at Tarija. [609]

XIX

What Father Doroteo Giannecchini has to Say Regarding the Noctenes and Other Mataco Tribes

101 "The Noctenes, Matacos, Vejoses, Guiznaes, and Chulupies belong to one single nation, for all speak the same language and have the same customs."

"Such nations are differentiated by their name and by traits ● 184 which I shall call provincial or local."

"Our Noctenes, for example, who are the ones who inhabit the 101 country between the foot of the Pisapo mountain range and Pikírenda, 50 131 or 60 leagues to the east, are called Noctenes. In the vicinity of Pikírenda they take the name of Guiznaes; but they are of the same family as our Noctenes and are even related to them by blood."

"From Pikírenda onwards, some 30 leagues, more or less, and up to the Paraguay River they take the name of Chulupies; and along the whole right bank of the Pilcomayo River, from our first Noctén mission on to the Paraguay River, it is the same tribe: their